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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

July 11, 2012

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ROBERT L. SIMMONS, II, STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

This morning the Committee on Armed Services received a briefing on the annual report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, as required by section 1202 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 (Public Law 106-65, 10 USC 113 note). As you are aware, the 2012 report was once again submitted after the statutory deadline and failed to contain some of the required reporting elements, as well as other sections that have been included in prior years. I consider the report to be wholly inadequate and believe it minimizes the uncertainty and the challenges posed by China's military build-up. To make matters worse, this year's redacted report provided no savings to the taxpayer. This year's 19-page report evidently cost the Defense Department \$85,000 to prepare, nearly \$12,000 more than last year's 70-page report. As I questioned the briefers regarding the dramatic reduction to the content of the report and the concurrent increase in the cost of preparation, I was dismayed to learn that there is a larger problem at the root of this matter.

The briefers informed the committee that senior political leadership within the Office of the Secretary of Defense has implemented a new policy restricting the length of reports to Congress to 15 pages. The briefers confirmed that this policy was established without consultation with the committees of jurisdiction. It would not appear the justification is cost-savings, but rather an internal decision to limit the amount of information to be provided to Congress – irrespective of the subject matter or origin of the requirement.

Taken in context with the issuance of gag orders, the requirement for senior officials to sign non-disclosure agreements, and the tardiness of responses to requests for information, this policy reeks of obstructionism, a lack of transparency and is harmful to constitutionally mandated Congressional oversight and national security. Mr. Secretary, this policy must be rescinded immediately.

I respectfully request a response to this matter within 24 hours that such policy guidance has been rescinded, together with assurances that alternative guidance – which does not arbitrarily limit the

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length of reports to Congress – has been distributed Department-wide. Thank you for your prompt attention to these serious concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Buck McKeon", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Chairman

HPM:jbs